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ABSTRACT

Findings reported in this paper derive from data in state curriculum documents, reports, and phone interviews with state officials in New York, California, Florida, and Texas. Evidence from the burgeoning state-level curriculum control systems for high school mathematics and social studies in these states suggests that both advocates and critics of state top-down reforms might be exaggerating the effects of state curriculum policies. When analyzed in terms of prescriptiveness, consistency, authority, and power, these state curriculum control policies seem to leave considerable discretion to school districts, schools, and teachers. All four states present unfinished pictures of curriculum control and have yet to link all the curriculum policies. Only California and Texas have linked curriculum policies consciously around their curriculum guidelines. New York, the most prescriptive state, specifies content and skills at the unit level for required courses. California prescribes subject content and student skills in curriculum guidelines more generally. Texas' and Florida's prescriptions are limited mainly to identifying desired basic skills loosely connected with various courses. States might not have achieved the uniformly high authority necessary to claim pervasive influence on practice. Five data tables support observations and conclusions. (6 references) (MLH)

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Examining the evidence: Have states eliminated local control of curriculum?

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Introduction

Since the late 1970's and early 1980's, several states have moved rapidly to expand their top-down control over the secondary curriculum (Boyd, 1987, Kirst, 1987). Both advocates and critics of such expansion claim that such state-level policies reduce district, school or teachers' control over content and pedagogy. Such claims assume states have narrowed local "zones of discretion," making schools and teachers instruments of state policy. Concerned with lax standards, insufficient accountability and inadequate leadership, advocates view decreased local discretion as necessary to reach academic excellence, usually defined as higher standardized test score achievement.

Critics claim that such expansion has "neutered" teachers (Frymier, 1987), deskilled them (McNeil, 1988), removed their professional autonomy (Rosenholtz, 1987), and made schools unresponsive to "the needs of students and the desires of parents" (Darling-Hammond, 1989). Such claims seem to assume some previous unspecified time when school districts, schools and teachers had significantly larger zones of discretion than they do presently.

The findings reported in this paper derives from evidence in state curriculum documents, reports, independent reports by other researchers and phone interviews with state officials in New York, California, Florida and Texas. Evidence from the burgeoning state-level curriculum control

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systems for high school mathematics and social studies in these states suggests that both advocates and critics of state top-down reforms may be exaggerating the effects of state curriculum policies. When analyzed in terms of prescriptiveness, consistency, authority and power, state curriculum control policies in mathematics and social studies seem to leave considerable discretion to school districts, schools and teachers.

What do state curriculum control systems try to control?

States typically use several policies to control curriculum. Among those are policies about graduation requirements, student achievement testing, state subject-specific curriculum guidelines, school evaluation and certification, materials selection processes, teacher certification requirements, and educational information management systems. Each of the states listed above has continued to expand and strengthen most of these policies, though their ability to control local practice or limit local discretion is far from complete.

Qualities important to states' ability to control curriculum practice

States' capacity to limit local discretion through state policy may depend on four qualities associated with policies: consistency, prescriptiveness, authority and power. *Consistency* refers to whether state curriculum policies tend to match or strengthen each other. Schools and teachers are more likely to implement curriculum policies aligned with each other than policies that either lack such connection or undermine each other. *Prescriptiveness* refers to the specificity and extensiveness of curriculum policies. If curriculum policies specify several aspects of curriculum content and teaching processes, schools and teachers are more likely to implement them than if policies treat only some aspects of content or teaching process or if policies refer to unclear generalities. To limit discretion, state policies must gain school and teacher acceptance or acquiescence. To do so, they must be authoritative. *Authority* implies teacher and school acceptance of and acquiescence to state appeals to authority. States may appeal to law, expertise, norms, traditions or the charisma of policy makers. When state policy explicitly appeals to several bases of

authority, schools and teachers may be more likely to accept that authority than if the policy has only one basis. For example, if a policy appeals to tradition, normative practice and law, it is likely to gain greater acceptance than a policy that only appeals to the authority of state law. *Power* refers to the ability of states to enforce policies through rewards or sanctions or both. Given the large number of authoritative state curriculum policies, when the authority of a policy is backed by power, schools and teachers may be more likely to regard such a policy as more worthy of attention. For example, high stakes student achievement tests are more likely to make teachers change their content than diagnostic tests with few stakes for students or teachers. In summary, state curriculum control policies will most likely influence practice or limit local discretion when they:

1) strengthen or enhance each other;
2) call for specific and large scale changes in local practice;
3) appeal explicitly to several bases of authority;
4) contain effective sanctions or rewards.

Consistency across state curriculum control policies

If curriculum control policies are highly consistent with each other, schools and teachers are more likely to implement them as the state wants. A consistent system of curriculum policies would link all the following major state curriculum policy systems: curriculum guidelines, course requirements, student tests, school evaluation systems, teacher certification policies, instructional materials policies, and information gathering systems. While taking major strides toward consistency, New York, California, Florida and Texas policy systems are not completely consistent.

The four major reform states seem to share moderate across-policy consistency. Texas and California are probably most consistent of the four states. Both Texas and California build other curriculum control policies around the curriculum guidelines. For example, Texas changes its "essential elements" (its basic skills guidelines) by first changing its standards for the choice of instructional materials. In doing so, it hopes to assure that teachers will have the materials consistent with what the

curriculum prescribes. The state basic skills tests follow the changes in the essential elements to help insure that students are more likely to have been exposed to materials and teaching consistent with the revised essential elements. Furthermore, when visiting schools for certification purposes, state evaluators check a sample of teachers' grade books, lessons plans and classes to determine if teachers follow the essential elements. California bases its school evaluation, staff development, student testing, and instructional materials policies directly on its curriculum guidelines, what they call "Frameworks." In summary, in California and Texas, the central focus of state control is local application of the state curriculum guidelines; other policies are linked through their mutual connection to the guidelines.

Florida and New York show less consistency than the other two states. For example, Florida's school evaluation and teacher certification/inservice policies operate separately from the curriculum guidelines. Florida State school evaluators focus on paper compliance; they do not collect data on the extent to which courses follow state guidelines. Also, New York lacks an instructional materials policy; and it leaves control over teacher education almost entirely to higher education. Finally, in neither Florida nor New York do state officials collect any information that would tell them whether teachers or administrators understand or apply the curriculum.

As Table 1 shows, none of the states have dramatic inconsistencies across their different curriculum policies. In the states the most consistency is evident between the curriculum guidelines and student testing policies. Except Texas, states do not appear to have created horizontally interlocking policy systems. Three out of four states seem not to have linked their information-collecting apparati to systems other than student testing. In all four states, teacher training seems disconnected from other policies; in California and New York there is no visible linkage between the state guidelines and teacher pre-service training. In all four states, neither beginning nor experienced teachers have to show that they understand the state curriculum in their subject area. Only two of the states, Texas and Florida, link instructional materials selection to the curriculum. Even in these states, only a few of the many selection criteria concern the state curriculum, and selection committees usually contain few individuals familiar with the state curriculum in the subjects. In summary, only Texas and California seem potentially able to limit school and teacher discretion through consistent and reinforcing policies.

Table 1. Consistency across states' curriculum control policies

Policy	New York	California	Florida	Texas
Curriculum guidelines	high	high	high	high
Course requirements	high	moderate	low	high
Student tests	high	high	high	high
School Evaluation	low	high	moderate	high
Teacher Certification	none	low	low	moderate
Instructional materials	none	low	high	high
Informational System	low	high	low	low
Overall	low	good	low	good

Prescriptiveness of curriculum guidelines

State curriculum guidelines may be more or less extensive and detailed. The more states prescribe many aspects of the content and teaching process, the more constrained teachers and schools are likely to feel. That is, states that prescribe state subject goals, course objectives, invariate course sequences, unit structure and objectives, unit and lesson sequences, lesson structure and objectives, course materials and exemplary activities are more likely to limit schools and teachers curriculum discretion. Examination of the curriculum guidelines shows that, except New York, the states prescribe very few of these items in their curriculum guidelines. Instead, they leave them to schools and teachers.

Though not completely prescriptive down to the classroom lesson, New York's and California's curriculum guidelines seem most prescriptive of the four states in our study. Compared with the other three states, New York's curriculum guidelines seem most extensive and more specific. State curriculum guidelines contain over-arching subject area rationales, scope and sequence and skills students should learn with the content. They also include course syllabi. These syllabi contain general and more specific learning objectives and possible teaching methods for each unit of each course needed for graduation. New York tests every student's knowledge of the course syllabi: they require that students pass either a basic

(competency) or more advanced test (Regents comprehensive) for each course. Even New York's highly prescriptive curriculum guidelines leave considerable discretion to teachers and schools in the following areas: materials, specific lessons, lesson sequencing within units, and lesson objectives.

Though the curriculum guidelines are not specific as New York's at the unit level, California guidelines are extensive and specific in different ways. They present a subject-specific set of goals justified by a rationale, a set of subject objectives, general advice about teaching and materials, and a clear scope and sequence across the K-12 grades. For example, the California History-Social Science Framework prescribes the teaching of particular interpretations of history, possible units of study, and general characteristics for instructional materials. However, in comparison with New York's course and unit specific guidelines, California's K-12 Frameworks lack specificity. California's guidelines do not prescribe unit structure and objectives, lesson sequencing, exemplary lesson content or teaching processes, wanted student information-processing skills or specific instructional materials. For example, California History/Social Science guidelines broadly prescribe the integration of literature into the teaching of history and explain why using literature is important. But, in the Framework or the accompanying guide to History/Social Science materials, the State provides little information or advice to high schoolteachers about how to use literature in the units or lessons or what literature would be most suitable.

Florida's and Texas' curriculum guidelines are extensive though less specific than New York's and California's. For example, Florida's curriculum guidelines lack over-arching rationales and underlying principles for subject areas that one can find in both the New York and California guidelines. Also, Florida's guidelines specify goals and behavioral objectives for a variety of skill levels of social studies and mathematics courses that meet graduation requirements. Yet, Florida's and Texas' behavioral objectives for many courses contain unclear terms, leaving schools and teachers wide latitude to interpret the objectives. Also, Florida's and Texas' curriculum guidelines do not extend to the entire subject curriuclum in either mathematics or social studies. They are limited to minimum skills or "essential elements," as Texas calls their basic skills curriculum criteria; neither Florida nor Texas examine competence in higher-order thinking (this may be changing in mathematics). Lastly, both states'

guidelines also lack unit organization, and scope and sequence information. In comparison with either California's or New York's, Texas' and Florida's guidelines are less prescriptive.

As Table 2 indicates, evidence from these states seems to suggest that states leave considerable discretion to teachers and schools to choose content and methods. New York State potentially limits the discretion of schools and teachers to choose content and teaching practices at the unit level in required courses. The other three states either lack an overall vision of a subject curriculum content and skills, or specific information on what and how to teach beyond the course level. None of the states prescribes content of teaching methods below the unit level. They leave classroom instruction completely to schools and teachers.

Table 2. Prescriptiveness of state curriculum guidelines

Dimension of prescriptiveness	New York	California	Florida	Texas
Overall goals or mission of subject curriculum	high	high	none	low
Course objectives	high	low	high	none
Invariate course sequences	high	low	none	none
Unit objectives	high	none	none	none
Lesson structure & objectives	none	none	none	none
Lesson sequencing	none	none	none	none
Exemplary activities & teaching methods	moderate	low	none	none
Materials specified	none	low	moderate	moderate
Overall	high	moderate	poor	poor

Authority of states' curriculum control policies

Schools and teachers are more likely to implement state curriculum policies they accept as authoritative. States that appeal explicitly to multiple sources for the authority of these policies are more likely to find school and teacher acceptance. Evidence from the four major reform states shows that New York may have the most authoritative set of educational policies.

New York appeals more clearly to more sources of authority for more of its curriculum policies than any of the other states. Much of this results from the long tradition of the New York University Regents' influence over high school education graduation requirements and standards of performance. Underlying all curriculum guidelines are both the legal and traditional authority of the New York Regents to prescribe curriculum standards and assess their effectiveness through Regents examinations. The latter are widely regarded as highly reliable and valid tests of subject knowledge, the product of competent experts. Since New York curriculum guidelines neatly match the Regents examinations, involve the advice and consent of state, local and national curriculum teachers, professors and consultants, curriculum guidelines also appeal to the authority of expertise. The curriculum syllabi explicitly identify these bases for authority in the introductory pages. For example, the U.S. History syllabus describes the Regents' curriculum goals, how the social studies program goals match those, and then how the syllabus goals form an important element of the social studies program goals. Also, the beginning of the document lists state and nationally-prominent individuals responsible for the creation of the syllabus. Further, it identifies the steps the state took at particular times to insure that the syllabus was teachable in actual schools. New York curriculum documents are very clear that curriculum policy authority derives from the Regents' approval, and national and state expertise. The control policies appeal to the traditional authority of the Regents and the knowledge and skills of experts. Curriculum policies other than student testing and curriculum guidelines, such as school evaluation and information management also have a long history in New York. This state was one of the first states in the country to certify schools and collect educational information. New York's explicit appeals to several bases for authority, including tradition, law, expertise and norms of practice seem likely to influence schools' and teachers' willingness to follow state curriculum policies.

Texas' appeals to authority may also encourage local application of state curriculum policy. Texas' curriculum control policies appeal mainly to the authority of law; but they also appeal to expertise. Texas educational law and regulations authorize the state curriculum, teachers' adherence to the curriculum, and textbook selection and student tests based on that curriculum. Texas seeks the advice of mainly subject supervisors, and to a lesser extent, state teachers and administrators on its curriculum guidelines, its testing

and its textbook requirements. Texas' curriculum documents are less clear than New York's about who gives advice, how advising works, and with what effect. However, Texas state curriculum consultants claim they seek the advice of state supervisors and school administrators at annual meetings, and at state and regional policy pre-approval hearings. The Texas mathematics and social studies guidelines also appeal to the expertise of national subject organizations. The social studies guidelines refer to National Council for the Social Studies standards, and mathematics guidelines refer to National Council of Teachers of Mathematics standards.

Florida's appeals to authority seem narrow and less likely to encourage policy adherence. Florida's curriculum control policies appeal to fewer sources of authority less explicitly than New York's and Texas'. The essential and explicit basis for the authority of Florida curriculum policies is that of the State Legislature. Since the curriculum guidelines list no experts of any sort, the guidelines are not presented to teachers or the general public as the product of experts, as are California's, Texas' and New York's. State officials, apparently without the aid of other national or State curriculum experts, write the State curricula. Since Florida appeals less to the expertise of either state or national curriculum experts, curriculum control policies may lack authority in the eyes of teachers, professors and administrators.

California's curriculum policies also seem less authoritative than the other three states. The authority of California curriculum policies may be compromised by at least two factors: the potential conflicts over the legal authority of different curriculum guidelines; and California mathematics and social studies curriculum guidelines' departures from common and traditional practice.

There are conflicting curriculum guidelines based on different sources of authority. In California, there are two sets of curriculum documents in Mathematics and History-Social Science (what California calls social studies). These are the legally-authoritative Model Curriculum Standards, authorized by the state legislature, and the curriculum Framework, written by experts commissioned by the State Department of Education. From state documents and interviews, it is unclear which of the two documents represent the "real" state curriculum guidelines. Especially in social studies, the Model Curriculum Standards and the Framework differ widely concerning the structure, content and purpose of social

studies. While the two corresponding mathematics curriculum documents are more similar to each other, state officials now seem to regard many aspects of the Model Curriculum Standards as out of date.

In addition to conflicting authority at the state level, California curriculum guidelines conflict with common curriculum practice in high school mathematics. For example, the Mathematics Framework proposes teaching the same mathematical concepts to all high school students; the History-Social Science Framework places history at the center of the social studies program with the social sciences in a vague supporting role. Both the authority conflicts implicit in different curriculum guidelines and the pioneering nature of California curriculum reflect the weaker California appeals to authority.

Appealing to clear, multiple, and non-conflicting sources of authority is more likely to insure that schools and teachers will understand, accept and implement policies. According to Table 3, New York appears to appeal to authority most effectively. Texas' and Florida's appeals to authority, while based mainly on law and regulatory authority, are clear. Because of the potential for conflict between different curriuclum guidelines, California's appeals to authority may seem ineffective to schools and teachers. However, appealing to authority does not give authority. To determine better the effectiveness of state appeals, it is necessary to examine how school officials and teachers regard the authority of state policies. Our district, school and teacher studies can better address local perceptions of authority.

Table 3. State curriculum control policy authority sources

Policy	New York	California	Florida	Texas
Curriculum guidelines	tradition (e) expertise (e) norms (i) law (e)	expertise (e,m) charisma (i) law (m)	law (e) norms (i)	law (e) expertise (e, i)
Course requirements	tradition (e) norms (i) law (e)	law (e)	law (e)	law (e)
Student tests	tradition (e) expertise (e) norms (i) law (e)	law (e) expertise (e)	law (e) expertise (i)	law (e) expertise (i)
School Evaluation	tradition (e) expertise (e) law (e)	law (e) expertise (e)	law (e)	law (e)
Teacher Certification	law (e)*	law (e)*	law (e)	law (e)
Instructional materials	norms (i)	norms (i) expertise (e)	law (e) norms (i)	law (e) norms (i)
Informational System	expertise (e) law (e)	law (e)	law (e)	law (e)
Overall	high	low	OK	OK

e=authority explicitly stated in documents or interviews
i=authority implicit in policies or implementation of policies
m=documents or interviews show mixed or inconsistent authority appeals
*=authority given mainly to higher education institutions

Power

Authority and power are related. State power describes the means of encouraging or insuring that schools and teachers implement curriculum policies. States can use sanctions or rewards or both. Clearly authoritative policies may need little application of state power. However, since there are so many state curriculum policies, schools and teachers may be more likely to bring their practices into alignment with those policies that have unmistakable consequences for the school, the teachers or the students. For example, teachers may implement those aspects of the curriculum most likely to appear on high stakes student achievement tests. Schools may use state-approved instructional materials when the state either shares the cost of such materials or refuses to certify schools that do not use such materials.

Of the four states, Texas and New York appear to use the most powerful sanctioning mechanisms across more policies than the other two states. Texas builds more sanctions into more curriculum control policies than any of the states in this study. By law, schools must offer the state curriculum, teachers must teach that curriculum, and students must pass a test based on that curriculum to graduate. The state monitors these things through state testing and school evaluation policies. Should schools not offer the curriculum or if their teachers are not planning lessons, teaching and evaluating students using the curriculum, the state can intervene directly in the operation of the school. The state can assign individuals to oversee their operations and to insure compliance with state mandates to teach the curriculum. Schools can lose their accreditation and ability to operate if they do not comply. Texas public schools can use only one of the three state-approved textbooks; failure to use state-approved textbooks violates state law.

Like Texas, New York backs its already authoritative curriculum policies with sanctions. Students must pass syllabus-based competency (non-college-track) or comprehensive (college-track "Regents") tests in required courses to graduate. Also, in New York, schools must meet minimum standards on test performance or they will be monitored more closely, and may be cited publicly for lower test score performances. New York is the only one of the four states that has published a state ranking of schools and distributed it to the major newspapers. Unlike Florida or California and like Texas, New York can require that low-performing schools receive state help, administrative and curriculum guidance. Furthermore, if schools do not improve, New York can take them over. New York is now beginning to reward higher-performing schools by choosing them as models for other schools, offering them the reward of positive publicity. New York's curriculum system uses strong sanctions, and is beginning to consider using rewards.

Florida's curriculum control system seems less powerful than either Texas' or New York's but more powerful than California's. Both sanctions and rewards are common to Florida's basic skills-oriented curriculum control policies. Students cannot graduate without passing minimum competency tests based directly on state basic skills curriculum guides. Textbooks cannot be adopted if they do not address the basic skills standards in the curriculum. Also, schools receive more state financial help to buy textbooks that match the requirements of the curriculum guidelines.

However, Florida's sanctions and rewards seem less powerful that those of New York or Texas. Unlike New York, Florida offers no rewards or sanctions for teachers to teach, or students to learn, the part of the state curriculum that exceeds basic skills. For several years Florida has required that students pass tests of basic reading, writing and mathematics content and skills. But, only this year has Florida added tests of student higher level classes. These are low stakes tests, administered to a sample of eligible students with no consequences for graduation, school funding or teacher evaluation.

Relative to that of the other three states, the California curriculum control policies lack sanctioning power. First, the California State Legislature prohibits the imposition of a state curriculum on local schools. Second, partly because of this prohibition, California does not sanction schools, teachers or students for not following the curriculum. California calls for districts to review their curriculum in light of the state guidelines. California tests student knowledge of mathematics and will test their knowledge of social studies guidelines annually. Yet, the test results are only reported for schools, not individual students. The results have no direct consequences for students or teachers. Nor do the high schools receive extra funding for higher testing performances or increased state monitoring or demands for lower testing performances.

California's control of curriculum depends mainly on school cooperation. California uses rewards instead of sanctions for leverage. Through the school improvement and staff development programs, California uses financial incentives for districts that appear to adopt state curriculum standards. Also, recently California has begun rewarding the highest 15 percent of test-scoring schools annually in a public ceremony. However, the reward structure in California may be compromised by the lack of consistent state financial support. The state legislature has created many reward-based programs and withdrawn money from the programs later. The programs stay after the rewards disappear. The lack of sanctions and the tendency of the Legislature to de-fund or reduce funding to reward-based programs tend to make California's control of curriculum less powerful than New York's or Texas' controls.

Based on the summary in Table 4, California seems to lack sanctioning power, but it also uses rewards more than the other states. New York and Texas seem equally able to use their considerable sanctioning power. Florida falls somewhere in the middle. Most of New York's and Texas' sanctioning

power is directed toward schools or students instead of teachers. Because of their curriculum focus on basic skills, Texas' and Florida's power mechanisms are most directed at limited portions of the school. Therefore, even in states with the most powerful policies, it would seem that teachers' discretion to teach what they want and how they want is large. In California, schools wanting extra funds need to meet state curriculum guidelines but teachers in those schools are free to teach whatever they want how they want.

Table 4. State curriculum control policy power

Policy	New York	California	Florida	Texas
Curriculum guidelines	high (s)	none	moderate (s)*	high (s)
Course requirements	high (s)	high (s)	low (s)	high (s)
Student tests	high (s)	low (r)	high (s)*	high (s)*
School Evaluation	high (s)	low (r)	low (s)	high (s)
Teacher Certification/ staff development	low (s)	low (r)	moderate (s)	high (s)
Instructional materials	none	none	high (r)	high (s)
Informational System	none	none	none	none
Overall	high	poor	moderate	high

* applies only to basic skills guidelines and courses

Conclusion

As the foregoing text indicates and Table 5 summarizes, states' curriculum top-down control policies do not seem to have the strength for good or evil often attributed to them by advocates or critics. Despite admittedly major increases in policy consistency, prescriptiveness, authority and power, states still present unfinished pictures of curriculum control. All the states in our study have yet to link (and some have yet to create) all the curriculum policies. Only California and Texas have linked curriculum policies

consciously around their curriculum guidelines. Even the most prescriptive state (New York) specifies content and skills at the unit level for required courses for college-bound and non-college-bound students. California prescribes subject content and student skills in its curriculum guidelines more generally. Texas' and Florida's prescriptiveness are limited mainly to identification of desired basic skills loosely connected with several courses. States might have not achieved the uniformly high authority necessary to claim pervasive influence on practice. While New York clearly appeals explicitly to several bases of authority for its curriculum policies, the most common basis for authority among all states is the clear appeal to state law and regulation and the implicit appeal to perpetuating present norms of practice. States like California, that redefine the content and teaching methods in social studies and mathematics, may also have difficulty establishing the authority of their curriculum policies.

Table 5. A summary of the potential of policies to limit school and teacher discretion

Policy	New York	California	Florida	Texas
Curriculum guidelines	high	moderate	low*	moderate*
Course requirements	high	moderate	low	low
Student tests	high	low	moderate*	moderate*
School Evaluation	low	high	low	high
Teacher Certification	none	none	low	low
Instructional materials	none	low	moderate	moderate
Informational System	low	low	low	low
Overall	moderate	low	low	moderate

* mainly with respect to basic skills

Prescriptive, consistent, authoritative and powerful state curriculum policies are more likely to limit schools' and teachers' discretion. According to the summary in Table 5, it appears that both critics and advocates need more convincing data for their claims. Examples of such data might include:

1) historical or longitudinal data on objective and subjective measures of school and teacher discretion before and after the implementation of state policies; or

2) careful field research how school and teacher educational decisions are constrained by state policies.

Based on the present analysis, New York and Texas may be somewhat likelier than either Florida or California to limit the discretion of local schools and teachers in deciding what to teach and how to teach it. Yet, even New York and Texas appear to leave considerable discretion to teachers and schools in the selection of what to teach and how to teach it.

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